

**A Study of Literary Adaptation:  
Film Reviewing and the Construction of  
Cultural Value**

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**Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of  
the MA (Cultural Studies) Degree of the University of London**

**Institute of Education (2 September 2002)**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is a study of film adaptations of literary works. The main discussion consists of three parts. The first part focuses on reviewing a selective range of studies of film adaptations published to date, and discusses the major methods and theoretical approaches that have been attempted. Although it assesses their contribution to the field, the primary aim is to interrogate the limits and problems of the existing studies. The second part examines the ways in which canonical novels are recontextualised in reviews of film adaptations. Reviews of films of canonical novels appear to recruit the traditional paradigm of literary studies in the construction of meaning of the source work. This will be explained through examples of reviews from different sources. Finally the discussion moves to examine the ways in which films that are based on classic novels are recontextualised in reviews. Comparing them with reviews of films which are not related to canonical texts, especially in terms of relation between the author and the reader/ viewer, will show how different protocols are applied when each kind of film is concerned; and this signifies that adaptations are distinguished within the practice of film reviewing, which ultimately marginalize adaptations and delimits the possibility of film art.

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## 1 Introduction

One estimate claims that 30 percent of the movies today derive from novels and that 80 percent of the books classified as best sellers have been adapted to the cinema. If the connection between the two practices has persisted so adamantly through the years, it seems especially pressing now, at the end of the twentieth century, as an index of why the movies are important, why literature still matters, and what both have to offer a cultural period in which boundaries are continually being redrawn.

(Corrigan, 1999, p. 2)

The above remark astutely sums up major issues concerning film adaptations of literary works. The continuous interaction between literature and film, although it is usually film that initiates the interaction, has generated substantial amounts of debate and received legitimate attention. Many English and/ or media studies departments in universities offer courses on film adaptations and the Academy Awards confers a separate award for adapted screenplays, distinguishing them from original ones. Such phenomena tend to be read as encroachment of visual culture upon the traditional culture of literacy (Ibid. p. 5). Therefore, John Ellis finds the aim of an adaptation in that:

The adaptation trades upon the memory of the novel, a memory that can derive from actual reading, or as is more likely with a classic of literature, a generally circulated cultural memory. The adaptation consumes this memory, aiming to efface it with the presence of its own

images. The successful adaptation is one that is able to replace the memory of the novel with the process of a filmic or televisual representation.

(1982, p. 3)

This not only indicates the increasing importance of film but also raises debates concerning the relation of film and literature and the established hierarchy between the two, often privileging literature, but sometimes seeking to dismantle the hierarchy and look for a way to embrace the two in a culturally productive manner. This then is extended to and entwined with debate around ‘high’ art and popular art, which points to and calls for cultural studies.

However, in the majority of cases studies on adaptation appear to dwell on the question “why literature still matters”, in other words, the question of the ‘fidelity’ of a film adaptation to its source literature, without making significant progress toward further issues. The answers and explanations to the question are generally of two kinds: one is that literature should not matter and the other is that there are reasons that literature still matters. However, both accounts have been less than successful in generating a productive method to explicate the practice of adaptation: the former tends to end up discarding literature as the inspirational source of a film, thus making meaningless the act of adaptation itself and the latter tends to subordinate film to literature, thus essentialising the meaning of adaptation as the visualisation of a novel. The limits of both approaches reside in the assumption of the ontological value of literature, which is an invention of the practice of criticism and interpretation.

This dissertation also tackles the same question, “why literature still matters”. However, it attempts to be different from existing studies in that it tries to answer the question by revealing the ways in which the meaning of literature is constructed in discourses on adaptations. Meaning is always a result of (re)contextualisation. To reject meaning without critiquing the ways in which it is constructed would only solidify it at best. Examining different ways literature and film are (re)contextualised in reviews of film adaptations from various sources will shed light on a new aspect of the question, “why literature still matters”.

In the following chapter I shall give a selective review of studies of film adaptations published to date, and discuss the major methods and theoretical approaches that have been attempted. The existing studies have contributed to a great extent to opening the ground for and building the foundation of the studies which deal with the intricate ways in which two media with different histories, cultural and institutional, are related. However, my discussion will be led into interrogating the limits and problems rather than the contribution of this discourse.

In the third chapter I shall examine the ways in which canonical novels are recontextualised in reviews of film adaptations. Located at the border of academic criticism and public discourse, reviews are an interesting and significant site that has the potential to dissolve or reinforce principles and

values laid down by academic institutions. Reviews of films of canonical novels appear to reveal the latter recruiting the traditional paradigm of literary studies in the construction of meaning of the source work. This will be explained through examples of reviews from different sources.

My focus in the fourth chapter moves to the ways in which films that are based on classic novels are recontextualised in reviews. Comparing them with reviews of films which are not related to canonical texts, especially in terms of relation between the author and the reader/ viewer, will show how different protocols are applied when each kind of film is concerned. Differences in the construction of the relationship between the author and the audience, and the audience and films signify that adaptations are distinguished within the practice of film reviewing, which is ultimately driven to an unproductive end.

I will conclude this dissertation with an attempt to point to a way to relocate studies of film adaptation in a terrain where the meaning of the encounter of film and literature can be constructed in productive ways. However, I aim less to construct a new paradigm or a theory than to reveal and illuminate how the two have acquiesced to the place they stand now and how the relation of the two has been constructed and sustained as I believe enlightening revelation always shows specific aspirations and points to the ways to realise them.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 ‘Compare and Contrast’ Approach

Major volumes of studies on film adaptations appear to have focused on the ways in which a novel is translated into a film focusing on the similarities and differences between the two. This is evidenced in the titles of the books, which invariably revolve around pairs of words, literature/ novels/ fiction and film/ cinema/ screen. The method of such studies can be conveniently named the ‘compare-contrast’ approach as their interest lies in seeking rules and principles in filmic translation of literary work, in ‘translatability’ between the two different media, which entails close examination of characteristics of each media from narrative structure to extradiegetic elements. The approach is productive in that it places film and literature in academically discussible terms, but it also presents limits and problems in extending the study to a dialectical dimension where the relationship between the two can be expounded.

The first book-length study on film adaptation of literature is George Bluestone’s *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* (1957). His study is based on the assumption that literature and film are intrinsically incompatible. He defines the two media as “two ways of seeing” (p. 1): one as physical sight through the eyes and the other as constructed sight through the mind, hence imagination. Such a difference in the mode of perception places film and literature in irreconcilable terms. Although he



confirms their “overtly compatible” (p. 2) relationship in which they share a common ground where they benefit each other in mainly commercial aspects, his study essentially focuses on revealing the ways in which they are “secretly hostile” (p. 2). He finds inevitable differences, from the origins and the materials to the conventions and audience, which leads to a conclusion that a literary text and its filmic adaptation are different things, each with its own unique and specific artistic properties. The characters and incidents are dissociated from the original novel when transferred to the film. The filmmaker is not a translator but a new author. However, the artistic independency of the two media in Bluestone’s explanation rather serves to preserve the uniqueness of literature and to highlight the limitations of film, as evidenced in his argument that filmic metaphor has a finite boundary limited to visual experience, whereas the literary image extends to the realm of infinite experience rendered by imagination.

To compare and contrast the two media seems to have become an almost inevitable approach in adaptation study. Even critics writing fairly recently imply that their attempt to analyse adaptation immediately enables them to engage in “analysing narrative in one medium and another, and perceiving what could be done well in one medium and not in others, in discovering the strengths and weaknesses of language, sound and pictures”(Giddings, Selby and Wensley, 1990, p. ix). However, such an approach is generally driven by the notion of the specificities of each medium, which generally results in establishing the constraints and limits of each medium, especially that of film.

Therefore, the critics claim:

Film is very good at conveying considerable information and detail in a short space [unlike literary text]...On the other hand, the novelist's problems in briefly indicating the complexities of location and chronological time, free the writer to deploy irony, *double-entendre*, depth symbolism, with a richer, roving imagination. (p. xiv)

They provide a written passage from Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* as an example of what is virtually impossible to be tackled by the cinematic art in that "miles of celluloid" and "immensity of cunning in montage" would be required to realise the two sentences:

No more firing was heard at Brussels—the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city: and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.

(*Vanity Fair*, Chapter 32 quoted in Giddings, et al. p. xv)

Therefore, their assertion that we should enjoy and judge films of Dickens, Thackeray, and Jane Austen "as films or television drama" (p. xix) seems based not so much on appreciation and valuation of the equally independent and unique properties of literature and film as on affirmation of the limitations of the latter in representing the former, thus condescendingly curtailing expectations about cinematic experience. This is not very far from Bluestone's conclusion.

Brian McFarlane's (1996) attempts to analyse adaptation are also largely based on the compare-contrast approach. However, his initial aim is to set in a

slightly different direction, in which he tries to discover common ground shared by literature and film, and to what extent the two media are interchangeable. Showing scepticism towards the tendency to assess film adaptation by its faithfulness to the original literary text, claiming that "[d]iscussion of adaptations has been bedevilled" (1996, p 8), "inhibited and blurred" by "the near fixation with the issue of fidelity " (p. 194), McFarlane suggests a theoretical framework within which the relationship of film and literature should be reconsidered. His study focuses on the common property of both media: narrative. He employs Roland Barthes's notion of narrative in 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative'<sup>1</sup> to distinguish the transferable part of narrative and explains that in adaptation 'functions' rather than 'indices' are important; furthermore, 'cardinal functions' rather than 'catalysers' are the most transferable. Although he continuously emphasises that studies of adaptation should move away from "the primacy of the printed text" (p. 22) and away from the fidelity issue, and be concerned with other types of approach--such as regarding film as a commentary upon the novel, his preoccupation with the question 'what is it possible to transfer from novel to film' is ultimately not effective since the question itself is encased within the notion of fidelity, and this suggests that film is incapable of translating the novel accurately or appropriately.

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<sup>1</sup> Barthes (1977) explains three levels of narratives: narration (top level), action (middle level) and functions (bottom level). Functions are subdivided into functions and indices. Functions are again divided into cardinal functions and catalysers; indices into indices and informants. Cardinal functions are the essential elements of a story; catalysers are complementary elements, such as supporting actions, that fill out a narrative.

A book-length study employing ‘the film-as-a-commentary approach’ had been published before McFarlane. C. Kenneth Pellow (1994) offers various case studies in a work with the most specifically defined title among all the books in the field, *Films as Critiques of Novels: Transformational Criticism*, where he interprets film adaptation as a critical commentary upon its original literary text. However, his study is based on the overtly asserted notion of hierarchy privileging literature over film. He claims “the film is almost invariably a shrunken version of the novel, a précis of sorts” because of the time limit imposed upon the film (p. 2). Moreover, the inability of the visual language to represent the verbal and economic conditions in the process of production causes the film to bear “little resemblance to what the novelist thought s/he had done” (p. 8). His limited notion of the specificities of the filmic media leads him “to understand the ways in which a film can never be—nor should ever try to be—a precise duplication of a novel” (p. 10). He concludes that “the transformational process is just the vehicle” and his goal for the study of adaptation is ultimately “to understand and appreciate the ‘making’ of novels” (p. 10). In his analytical framework, not only film but also the study of adaptation remains subliminal to literature.

Most studies that compare literature and film in terms of medium specificity fail to move enough away from the fidelity issue to bring the two into an arena where the uniqueness of each art can be realised and illuminated. They bear the fear deriving from the concept that the film is a “picture-book” (Orr, 1992) that

“there is...a risk that in the adaptation of novels into novel images some of the issues and arguments contained in the original may be diminished and even sacrificed to the demands of the new medium” (Reynolds. p. 10). Their limited notion of medium-specificity, which is confined to the idea that “every medium is inherently 'good at' certain things and 'bad at' others” (Stam, 2000, p. 58), generates another kind of fidelity, “an adaptation should be faithful not so much to the source text, but rather to the essence of the medium of expression” (Ibid.).

## **2.2 Paradigmatic Approach**

The awareness that the debate on film adaptations of literary works tends to be heavily oriented on the capacity of the filmic performance to translate the literary work, have been present all the way through and some scholars have attempted to produce different frameworks by which to study adaptations. The notable attempt is that they have tried to valorise diversities in the mode of filmic versions imposing paradigmatic organisation: each of the different modes of adaptation is analysed and evaluated in its own right rather than one method being discarded in favour of another. Thus, faithful translation of a novel is regarded only as one of many ways and principles of adaptation. Diversions and deviations in a film are interpreted as the place where the significance of an adaptation resides rather than a sign of failure.

One of the pioneers in the study of film adaptation, Geoffrey Wagner (1975), suggests that the methods of dramatisation should be categorised into three

types: transposition, commentary and analogy. Transposition is identified as the most dominant method “in which a novel is directly given on the screen, with the minimum of apparent interference” (p. 222). He points out that this method is also least satisfactory as the film production is merely a reduced “book illustration ” (p. 223). Films “where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect” is categorised as commentary. Such films are regarded as “creative restoration” (p. 223) providing a favourable interpretation of the original literary work. The final mode is analogy where the film becomes “*another* work of art” (p. 227). The creativity of the director is privileged over the author and “an analogy cannot be indicated a violation of a literary original since the director has not attempted to reproduce the original” (p. 227). Wagner’s categorisation seems to be loosely based on the degree of faithfulness of the film to the original work.

Michael Klein and Gillian Parker (1981) also identify three approaches to the study of adaptation. First, they point out that most films of classic novels tend to attempt to be literal translations of the text. In addition to fidelity to the main structure of the narrative, to the characteristics of the main characters, to the atmosphere of the novel, they point out the film’s affinity with the genre of the source is where the adaptation work offers most satisfying results. The second type is adaptation where the source text is significantly altered through “reinterpreting” or “deconstructing” although the core of the narrative structure is retained. The new interpretation is very often based on the director’s attempt to shed a new light on both film and its source work by placing the source work

in the context of the contemporary culture. The third approach to adaptation “regards the source merely as raw material, as simply the occasion for an original work” (p. 10). Cultural factors significantly contribute to the cinematic reshaping of the source work, especially differences in the national origin, of which most cases involve an English novel being made into an American film.

Dudley Andrew (1984, 2000) places the debate on film adaptation in a wider cultural practice and suggests three types of analysing adaptational work. He points out that “borrowing” is the most frequently employed mode of adaptation in the history of the arts, where the artist uses the material of preceding success. The main concern is “the generality of the original...its existence as a continuing form or archetype in culture”. The adapted work holds “the status of myth” as evidenced in works like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the success of adaptations lies in “the issue of their fertility, not their fidelity” (p. 30). “Intersecting” describes the mode of adaptation where “the uniqueness of the original text” is illuminated by the cinematic “refraction” of the original. The film attempts to present the “intransigent” of the text, and to endow it with a new life in the cinema. The third category Andrew suggests is “fidelity or transformation’ where the task of adaptation is regarded as “the reproduction in cinema of something essential about an original text” (p. 31). The primary task is to translate the basic elements of the text such as the narrative structure and the geographical settings, so “[t]he skeleton of the original...become[s] the skeleton of a film” (p. 32).

Karen Kline (1996) moves and delimits the debate to the field of critical practice, claiming that the differences of opinion on film adaptation "stem from the critics' adoption of differing paradigms for evaluating the film adaptation"(p. 70) and suggests four critical paradigms. Her first category is "translation" critics who judge "the film's effectiveness primarily in terms of its 'fidelity' to the novel" (p. 70). Similarities between the text and the film are valued and primarily measured. The second category is "pluralist" critics [who] allow that film exists and presents a 'coherent fictive world' (p. 71) in its own right, but expect film to remain loyal to the novel's 'spirit'--e.g. to the novel's mood, tone, and values" (p. 72). Thirdly, she identifies "transformation" critics who assume that novel and film are "separate, autonomous arts," "consider the novel raw material which the film alters significantly," and often privilege film over text, regarding the film as "an artistic work in its own right" (p. 73). As the final category, she suggests "materialist" critics, who practice the newest critical approach to film adaptation, examining "film as a product of cultural-historical processes" (p. 74) and regarding affinities between the film and its source novel as less important than do the other three kinds of critics. The commercial system within which the film is produced is considered as a significant factor in the cinematic reshaping of the novel.

The most recent study of the area is Timothy Corrigan's *Film and Literature: An Introduction and reader* (1999). He suggests four critical frameworks to study the practice of adaptation. The first one is concerned with historical contextualisation where film and literature should be considered "in terms of



their specific historical, national, and cultural contexts" (p. 2) His second proposition raises the question of traditional cultural hierarchies. He claims "the usual cultural hierarchy that places serious literature above supposedly less serious film" has been put in question in recent decades and "[t]he cinema now demands equal time and attention when we argue the relative value and meaning of movies and literature." (pp. 2-3) Thirdly he pays attention to the actual process of adaptation:

critical perspectives that align and distinguish film and literature are no longer confined to how film is or is not like a language or how expressive film may be of an author or how representative of a reality...Today there are other, if less broad, issues that complement these. The literary art of scriptwriting versus story writing, acting technique as it differs in the theater and on the screen, or the different ways readers and spectators make sense of their experience before a page or screen are just some of the rich and resonant perspectives that are reopening film and literary history in this century. (p. 3)

Lastly he proposes interdisciplinarity as an important factor to be considered in the study of adaptation. He points out that:

film and literature can now be discussed on the common ground provided by interdisciplinary and cultural studies. Both film and literature can be regarded as businesses and industries that participate in technological constraints and advantages. Both enlist or engage dominant figures of gender, race, and class. (3)

### 2.3 Limits and Problems

The critical paradigms suggested by most critics, although varying in the terms used to define categories and the range of discussion designated to each category, appear to share a principle on which the categorisation is based: the distance the film adaptation keeps from its source literature. How far the film has drifted away from the original text, how different it has become, and as a result how independent it has become are the governing concerns with those critics who attempt to deliver the discussion on adaptation from the fidelity issue by legitimising the diverse filmic versions. They delimit the fidelity discussion as just one way of looking at film adaptation, even regarding it as the “least interesting” method. Then they investigate the ways in which a novel is transformed by a film, in terms of the narrative structure, historical and geographical settings, characters, and so on. They also look at the possibility that film can serve as interpretation or commentary. Finally, they suggest a framework to consider non-textual ingredients used in the adaptation process, unique cultural-historical circumstances influencing the making of the particular film.

However, such undertakings operate on a great paradox turning the whole discussion back to the very point from which it was purported to have moved away. When empirically applied, each analytical paradigm becomes unable to hold onto its distinctiveness as an apparatus by which a film is re-contextualised. The actual analysis of the film within any framework suggested above basically coincides with the compare-contrast analysis, as the affinity of

the film with the original novel becomes the index to choose a framework. It is not the ways in which a film is analysed, but the final judgement conferred on the film, which is based not on the degree of faithfulness but on the mode and the degree of being faithful or unfaithful, that marks out each paradigm. Critics commenting on an adaptation, therefore, ultimately divide into two groups: those who employ one of the paradigms to look for the gap between the film and its source text and those who regard the faithfulness of the film to the novel as the vital factor in adaptation and evaluation of the film. The analyses of a film produced by the critics of both parties can be similar, if not identical, apart from the moments when the film is judged a ‘success’ or ‘failure’. The success of the film, for one, depends on the ways in which the film sheds a new light on the novel, discovering or adding new meaning, whereas for the other, the success of the film depends on skilful cinematic translation or representation.

Karen Kline (1996), whose relatively recent and comprehensive critical paradigms based on dominant “normative critical discourse about film adaptations” (p. 81), provides a good example of the paradoxical dilemma through the empirical application of her paradigms. After explaining the four paradigms, which are “translation”, “pluralist”, transformation” and “materialist”, she illustrates how each paradigm makes certain analysis possible. She places a film, *The Accidental Tourist*, an adaptation of a novel of the same title written by Anne Tyler, within each of the four paradigms and produces four kinds of critical commentary. Since, her paradigms have been

explained above, her empirical example is the sole concern here, which will show that each paradigm can function no more than as an indexical point of the old ruler that measures ‘fidelity’ of the film to its source novel.

Her approach is basically the ‘compare and contrast’ method. Firstly, she illustrates how the film visually realises the novel from the characterisation of Macon, the protagonist, to the narrative, and claims that the film is “an effective adaptation from the perspective of the translation paradigm” (p. 78). Then she moves into the pluralist paradigm and points out several variations from the novel arguing against Jonathan Yardley, the *Washington Post* critic, who criticises the film for being “too faithful”. One of the examples she presents is the film’s omission of the description of Baltimore, which particularly, in the novel, centres on the contrast between Macon’s suburban home and Muriel’s lower-class neighbourhood in inner-city Baltimore. This is employed to reflect Macon’s interaction with Muriel and the consequent transformation of his character. Kline asserts that the omission is made in the film in order to place an emphasis on interiority, the “implicit” trait in Macon’s character. She goes on to say that this alteration does not contradict the spirit of the novel:

rather, it is a point of difference that allows the film to create a coherent world within the film that is both uniquely cinematic and resonant with Tyler’s sense of her main character. (p. 79)

She also brings the film under the transformation paradigm and objects to the *New York Times* critic Janet Maslin who regards the film as a mere restaging of

the events from the novel. Although she admits that the film is generally an ineffective transformation of the novel because of its faithfulness, she explains how the opening sequence creatively and cinematically establishes the narrative frame of the whole film and is “a purely cinematic moment that spotlights the medium’s ability to convey ideas and emotions through its repertoire of formal techniques” (p. 79). In her last paradigm, the materialist, she suggests some other possible ways to look into the film such as the relationship between characterisation and casting, and other reasons for the modification in the film.

As evidenced in her analysis, the paradigms hardly enable Kline to generate different analyses; they only allow her to mark out the variations the film creates from the novel and to legitimise her positive viewpoint on the variations. Her analysis essentially demonstrates to what extent the film effectively translates the novel, since the meaning she discovers or constructs from the gap between the film and the novel is justified by the ‘original intention’ of the novelist. Her discussion of the film has hardly moved away from fidelity analysis. The foundation of her judgement that the film is an effective adaptation lies in her belief that the changes do not contradict the novel or become detrimental to the film as an adaptation. The liberty the film takes in adapting the novel is accepted because it “is not a contradiction of Tyler’s novel” (p. 79) and it “does not overtly contradict” the novel’s depiction of the character. (p. 81)

Kline gives a self-reflexive account at the end of her discussion hinting at the weakness of her paradigms as an analytical tool and the ineluctability of subjective interruption using them:

In the end, the critical paradigm might best be understood as a filter or lens which shapes the critic's perspective, facilitating his or her inevitable selectivity in isolating specific qualities in the novel and the film that the critic decides are most crucial to his or her judgments. Ironically, the very act of critical judgment thus involves a reductionist move, just as the adaptation of a novel to the screen necessarily requires parsimony. In this, the film critic duplicates the very movement he or she may criticize in the specific film adaptation... (p. 81)

Such a situation is found in most criticism on film adaptations, especially on adaptations of canonical texts where the critic becomes more reluctant to construct new meanings from the gap between the film and the novel and more concerned with the 'authorial intention' of the book. Brian Bialkowski (2001) seems to admit that the fidelity issue has become a kind of inextricable trap and suggests that it should be used as "a critical tool to interrogate the relationship between an adaptation and its source text", "rather than ignore the question of fidelity and run the risk of denigrating the relationship" (p. 203). However, his own analyses of a few adaptations of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* show no novelty, centring as they do on examining the ways in which the deviations of the filmic versions function to illuminate or reinforce the relationship between the characters and the plot of the novel. Adaptation

studies seems to be caught in an impasse in which an act of critique and opposition inevitably uses the tools it criticises and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes.

## 2.4 “Beyond Fidelity”<sup>2</sup>

More recent studies are focused on evaluating existing criticism of adaptation, particularly concerned with critiquing the way in which the majority of the criticism reinforces the ‘fidelity issue’. Many critics assert that ‘fidelity,’ which has been the pervasive concept in dealing with film adaptation of literary work, is inadequate, unjust and even detrimental. Robert Stam rebukes the ways in which the study of adaptation has been carried away into a moralistic debate by the ‘fidelity’ issue:

The language of criticism dealing with the film adaptation of novel has often been profoundly moralistic, awash in terms such as infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, and desecration, each accusation carrying its specific charge of outraged negativity.

(2000, p. 54)

Others also express considerable degrees of disapproval toward the negative impact the ‘fidelity’ issue generates describing it as a “pitfall” (Vincendeau, 2001, p. xii; Whelehan, 1999, p. 3). As implied in the language used by the critics, the primary problem with the ‘fidelity’ issue seems its anomalousness as a critical term. (Sheen, 2000, p. 2) The lack of theoretical principles against which the faithfulness of the adaptation can be measured creates incoherence

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<sup>2</sup> This is the title of Stam’s essay (2000).

and disagreement among the critics even concerning the same work. Therefore, fidelity is discarded as “an evaluative criterion” and restricted in its use as “a descriptive term to designate loosely a certain kind of adaptation” (McFarlane, 1996, p. 166).

One of the issues raised in arguing for the inadequacy of the ‘fidelity’ issue is the difference in the process of the literary and the filmic production. Stam comments that “[t]he demand for fidelity ignores the actual processes of making film--for example, the differences in cost and in modes of production” (p. 56). A novel is largely a production of a single individual, whereas a film is almost always a production through collaborative work. In addition, unlike the novel, film production is crucially affected by financial conditions. In a way the successful achievement of fidelity necessitates a good financial input. Although such arguments present a problem in that they neglect the fact a novel requires various kinds of collaborative work, which primarily includes the work of those involved in publishing and marketing the product to be consumed by public and critics, and that it also ignores countless films produced by a single individual, which have had no chance to be consumed by the public, it correctly points to the fact there is certain factors to be considered other than the works themselves.

Another problem discussed by many critics is that what the film is supposed to be faithful to remains obscure. Textual faithfulness is easier to measure when it is confined to narrative features such as plot, character, historical,



geographical, or social settings, although even they are hardly transferred to the film without a problem. It is more problematic when faithfulness is discussed concerning the ‘spirit’ or the ‘essence’ of the novel. The assumption that there is “an originary core, a kernel of meaning or nucleus of events that can be delivered by an adaptation” (Stam, 2000, p. 57), unchangeable “value of the originary text” (Whelehan, 1999, p. 3), or “the original author’s intentions” (Reynolds, 1993, p. 8), and adaptation is a matter of being faithful to “the spirit rather than the letter of the text” (Sinyard, 1986, p. x) is at the centre of the fidelity debate, in which the adaptor’s aim is to hold up “a clear glass screen...against the original work through which the audience are permitted to gaze with an undistorted view” (Reynolds, 1993, p. 9).

The notion that the literary work holds an immutable meaning which has to be preserved throughout the adaptation process induces a discussion related to the institutional practices of literary studies and film studies. A few critics have pointed out that the persisting and pervading influence of fidelity is due to the fact that the term has been born and fostered by institutional endorsement. Cinema’s relatively short history compared to the other arts becomes a primary consideration when assessing the relationship between film and literature. (Vincendeau, 2001, p. xiv) The seniority of literature seems to have a status of transcendental value, especially concerning the classical work, which is supposed to be revered and preserved. Stam points out that “[m]uch of the discussion of film adaptation quietly reinscribes the axiomatic superiority of literary art to film” based on an assumption that “older arts are necessarily

better arts". He also draws attention to the mobilisation of "the culturally rooted prejudice...that visual arts are necessarily inferior to the verbal arts; the logophilia", which he briefly traces back to the Platonic and Neoplatonic depreciation of the world of phenomenal appearance, and the valorisation of "sacred word" of holy texts through religious practices. (2000, p. 58).

Such notions or prejudices have been developed into and legitimised as an evaluative framework by institutional practices, mainly English literature departments of universities, which have been very active to embrace film as an object of study since the late 1960s for a rather derogatory reason. According to Robert B. Ray (2000), the admission of film study into literature departments was not irrelevant to the declining number of students and the consequent instability of the job market. Film study not only helped to attract more students but also offered the individuals in teaching positions a relatively easy way to extend their CVs. The studies of adaptation, which are mainly done in the comparison-contrast fashion requiring no substantial study of the two media, were "easy to turn out...and could be done over and over again" (p. 47). Naturally and ineluctably, with the inequality in knowledge and probably academic enthusiasm, placing film studies within the literature department has resulted in its subordination to the study of literature.

Erica Sheen (2000) also marks out the institutional factors that have contributed to the dominant notion of hierarchy between literature and film, giving an account of significant changes in American academe. In the 1980s,

film studies struggled to gain independence from English Literature, Mass Communication studies, American Studies and Modern Language Departments. However, because of the undeniable relation of the cinema to these studies, film studies have come to be part of the curriculum, in one form or another, of various departments in higher education. This is noticed by many critics. (Reynolds, 1993, pp. 2-3; Corrigan, 1999, p. 2; Bignell, 1999, p. 1) Sheen claims that through such interdisciplinary practice, film has not been treated as an subject studied for its own specific qualities, the audio-visual: “From such a perspective, film is frequently drawn into service to illustrate a notion of ‘culture’ which is similarly undefined as an object of study” (2000, p. 1). Therefore, while film studies are employed and deployed by diverse academic pursuits, film adaptation, where a text of a distinct institutional feature is transferred to another mode, “encapsulates the dilemma of institutional identity” (p. 2).

There have been some counter-movements in film studies against such institutional colonisation. Vincendeau points out that in the 1920s film theories were “concerned with authorship and filmic specificity, seeking to identify the essence of cinema and distance it from the other arts, especially the novel and the theatre” (2001, p. xv). Furthermore, in the postwar period, auteurism designated the director as the sole source of artistic force and elevated *mise-en-scene* as the incomparable language of the cinematic. (Ibid.) However, she also comments that these movements imply the tendency of film studies toward “their own purism”: “Film history sees the recourse to literature as a sign of the

cinema's embourgeoisement, away from its traditional popular origins" (Ibid.).

As a result, she remarks that there has been a relatively small amount of books and articles on film and literature produced in the field of film studies:

Though we find an interest in film and literature reflected in journals such as *Literature/Film Quarterly* and in a few manuals, the fact remains that the key contemporary film studies textbooks ignore it: see *The Cinema Book* (Cook and Bernink 1999), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Hill and Church Gibson 1998), and *Film Art* (Bordwell and Thompson, first published 1979). (Vincendeau, 2001, p. xv).

The academic independence of film studies, in a sense, reinforces the subordinated place of adaptations in literary studies being reluctant to embrace adaptations as part of its legitimate interest.

The studies of adaptation still seem straddling the border of literature and film studies without fully benefiting from the interdisciplinary practice. Whelehan notices that "[c]aught between literary criticism and film studies, such work [studies on adaptation] has not, even now, reached a happy compromise in its approach to the two media" (1999, p. 4). Ray also comments that the study of literature and film has been "under-developed" mainly because of "the apparatuses under which both have been taught". "Like the historical formation of any field of study, the formation of the field of film and literature is overdetermined" (Ray, 2000, pp. 38-9). Thus, "[f]idelity criticism is perhaps most appropriately seen as a rhetoric of possession" and as "not so much as a loss of articulation as an articulation of loss" (Sheen, 2000, p. 3).

In addition to the institutional aspect, the cultural value and status of a text is considered as one of the factors that raises the hierarchical notion when assessing the relationship between film adaptation and its source work. Vincendeau (2001) is astutely right when she remarks that

the derogatory attitude towards the cinema also operates in relation to twentieth-century books when they have reached a certain level of canonicity...[and that] literature, classical, cult or modernist, it seems, still shares the high cultural ground with opera, ballet and theatre. (xiv)

Dudley Andrew (1984, 2000) who seems sceptical toward the use of the term ‘adaptation’ expresses a similar concern about the cultural status of the literary text.

Adaptation delimits representation by insisting on the cultural status of the model, on its existence in the mode of the text or the already textualized. In the case of those texts explicitly termed adaptations, the cultural model that the cinema represents is already treasured as a representation in another sign system. (p. 29)

In both accounts, the cultural status of the literary text seems to derive from the degree of attachment of the text felt to be held by general readers. The “canonicity” in Vincendeau’s terms is not very far from “treasured[ness]” in Andrew’s. The fetishistic relationship between the text and the reader results in “an almost unconscious prioritising of the fictional origin over the resulting film” (Whelehan, 1999, p. 3). With a light psychoanalytic gloss and the

resonance of McFarlane (1996, p. 7), Stam (2000) offers an explanation of the relationship between the text, the reader/ audience and the film:

We read a novel through our introjected desires, hopes, and utopias, and as we read we fashion our own imaginary *mise-en-scene* of the novel on the private stages of our minds. When we are confronted with someone else's phantasy, as Christian Metz // pointed out long ago, we feel the loss of our own phantasmatic relation to the novel, with the result that the adaptation itself becomes a kind of 'bad object'" (pp. 54-5).

Reynolds (1993) points out another 'cultural unconsciousness' regarding creative work. He claims that "our culture venerates originality", and adaptation is often regarded as an "inferior creative activity" even if this is unsaid. Thus, "the artistic status of those responsible for creating the adaptations is relatively low, and the status of the texts they produce remains, at best, marginal" (p. 7). Therefore, he can furthermore assert, "although a novel is not physically destroyed when it is adapted, it is possible that its reputation as a novel...may suffer." (p. 9) The unconscious and almost unscrupulous statement on the cultural value of literature is seen in the following claim:

the real value of imaginative literature lies not in its ability to describe landscapes; nor is its role solely to provide the emotional satisfaction and pleasure that come when the aesthetic sensibilities of the reader are satisfied. Its true value lies in its ability to act as a forum in which the reader can debate and contest social and moral issues. Those who

are ultimately responsible for making and re-making novel images, therefore, carry a heavy social and cultural responsibility. (p. 11)

However, cultural value and status, canonicity, and originality are all constructed concepts, the production of accumulated discourses generated by institutional practices. What seems to be regarded as ‘cultural unconsciousness’ is actually a manifestation of public complicity with the principles established particularly by the institution of literature in which the Kantian and Arnoldian concepts have prevailed for a long time. James Naremore offers an account on the general tendency of film studies, which indicates that such influence have reached beyond the boundary of literary discipline :

Even when academic writing on the topic is not directly concerned with a given film's artistic adequacy or fidelity to a beloved source, it tends to be narrow in range, inherently respectful of the 'precursor text,' and constitutive of a series of binary oppositions that poststructuralist theory has taught us to deconstruct: literature versus cinema, high culture versus mass culture, original versus copy. (2000, p. 2)

Kantian aesthetics and Arnoldian cultural elitism may have been far more influential than Naremore's account suggests, since they have been fortified by another great idea, the Leavisite tradition, where cultural change, specifically the emergence of mass and popular culture, was depreciated as “cultural decline” (Tudor, 1999, p. 40), and which cultural studies had to break through. Thus it has been relatively easy for English literature departments to assume

that the “submerged commonsense of the average English department” (Naremore 2000, p. 2) is “consensual” and to gain “an autonomy within the public sphere” (Sheen, 2000, p. 3). The “system of critical writing that tends to reproduce a bourgeois mode of reception” (Naremore, 2000, p. 10) has been maintained through public complicity

Therefore, critics begin to challenge the idea that literary work holds an essence:

in fact there is no such transferable core: a single novelistic text comprises a series of verbal signals that can generate a plethora of possible readings, including even readings of narrative itself...The text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation. (Stam, 2000, p. 57)

The poststructuralist and postmodernist stance is rather commonly employed by recent critics who attempt to save adaptation from the “pitfall” of the fidelity debate. Stam (2000) specifically suggests a Bakhtinian notion of intertextual dialogism and Gerard Genette’s transtextuality. Introducing Genette’s five types of transtextual relations, he particularly finds “hypertextuality” to be most useful to the study of adaptation. Filmic adaptations are seen as hypertexts derived from pre-existing hypotexts. The various prior adaptations then form a cumulative hypotext which is available to the filmmakers. Adaptations then can be understood in the complex and wider context of intertextual reference and transformation, where texts are generating other texts “in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and



transmutation, with no clear point of origin” (p. 66).

Naremore (2000)’s suggestion shows affinities with Stam. He recalls Bazin’s prediction that in the realm of adaptation, the notion of the unity of the work of art would be destroyed, and asserts:

[t]he study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking, and every other form of retelling in the age of mechanical reproduction and electronic communication. By this means, adaptation will become part of a general theory of repetition, and adaptation study will move from the margins to the center of contemporary media studies.(p. 15).

He also adds that “the commercial apparatus, the audience, and the academic culture industry” (p. 10) should be considered.

Andrew (1984, 2000) suggests a wider and more general direction for the study of adaptation. He claims that adaptation studies should take “a sociological turn”, which he explains by suggesting possible questions to ask when assessing an adaptation:

How does adaptation serve the cinema? What conditions exist in film style and film culture to warrant or demand the use of literary prototypes? (p. 35)

Most critics currently active in producing writings on cinema and literature express their concern about the inadequacy of the fidelity issue and attempt to

deconstruct the hierarchical notion between literature and film. However, although they are successful in elucidating the ways in which the fidelity issue operates in the study of adaptation, they are unable to offer an alternative framework to replace the one they are seeking to discard, which is evidenced by the absence of book-length studies. Furthermore, such moves, be it poststructuralist or sociological, appear to be invalidated by an institutional practice which, being placed at the edge of academic criticism and public discourse on literary adaptations, continues to foster the old hierarchical notion between literature and film: film reviewing.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In the TV guide in *The Sunday Times* (2002, 25 August), *Clueless* which was to be shown on BBC2 is introduced as “Amy Heckerling’s comic reinterpretation of Jane Austen’s *Emma*” which is “hardly a model of fidelity”. This shows that discourses on literary adaptation, especially concerning the relation between novels and films, have moved into public domain and that of course reviews are the mediator.

### **3 Meaning of Literature in Film Reviews**

In this chapter I'd like to examine film reviews of adaptations of canonical texts, focusing on the ways in which literary texts are re-contextualised and re-read in explaining and evaluating films of novels and the relation of the two. This will show the practice of film reviewing tends to reproduce the old paradigm of literary studies where literary work holds immutable metaphysical meaning, thus it is rather devalued, and at the same time the film is also dissipated merely as a successful or an unsuccessful attempt to grasp the 'unity' of the novel, which will consequently illuminate how film has acquiesced its relation to literature as it stands. It will be a revelation that the hierarchical notion in the relationship between literature and film is reinstated and fostered by film criticism itself and furthermore will hint at the way to dismantle it.

The critical writing I would like to focus on here is primarily reviews from film journals and newspapers. Journalistic reviews are different from academic writings, as Bordwell explains, in that "[r]eviewing is part of the mass media, and it functions as an offshoot of the film industry's advertising: reviews publicize the film and sustain the habit of movie-going" (1989, p. 35). However, it forms a large part of the discourse around cinema and quoted in academic essays. Especially, concerning criticism on film adaptation of canonical work, the distinction between academic essays and journalistic reviews tends to dissolve as academic essays are also, almost always, involved

in evaluation, which is regarded as strictly the task of reviewing (Bordwell, 1989, p. 39; Monaco, 2000, p. 389). Furthermore, academic writing, inclined to be regarded as “an intellectual activity that exists primarily for its own sake” (Monaco, 2000, p. 389), is not able to show the dynamic relation between the actual practice of film, viewing and reviewing. After all, “[a]lthough most essayistic and academic writers are at pains to distinguish themselves from reviewers all critics are rhetorical creatures” (Bordwell, 1989, p. 38) and more often than not, the writers make crossovers.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, reviews are different in terms of style and audience according to the places they are published. Reviews from a film magazine or journal tends to be more analytical and closer to academic essays in the use of language, whereas reviews from newspaper are likely to be more focusing on providing information about a film. However, the aim of the analysis of reviews here to show commonality in the way meaning of literary work is constructed; thus the differences in characteristics of the sources from which reviews are extracted should not threaten the validity of the findings at least, and may maximise its universality at best.

### **3.1 Essentialisation**

The reviews are mostly drawn from the 1990s when there was a surge of film of literary works, especially canonical novels from the nineteenth century such as those of Jane Austen and Henry James. The bulk of reviews on film

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<sup>4</sup> The terms ‘critic’ and ‘reviewer’ will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

adaptation produced in the period, which, therefore, creates an incremental arguments as the discussion often revolves around different film adaptations of the same novel or the adaptations of different novels of the same author, provide an interesting corpus for analysis of the ways in which the discourse around the literary text, the film, and the relationship between them are constructed. Addressed to prospective or retrospective film viewers, the reviews are responsible for constituting public information and knowledge, which consequentially form complicity in that institutional values behave as if they are consensual.

Most of the film adaptations to be discussed here are adaptations of novels of five nineteenth-century novelists who are canonised in English and/ or American literary tradition. Films of Jane Austen's novels include *Emma* (1996), *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), and *Persuasion* (1995). Films of Henry James's include *The Portrait of Lady* (1997), *Washington Square* (1997), and *The Wings of the Dove* (1997). *Ethan Frome* (1993) and *The Age of Innocence* (1993), which are adaptations of Edith Wharton's novels, will be also discussed. *The Adventures of Huck Finn* (1994), an adaptation of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Scarlet Letter* (1996), a film of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel are included as well. Adaptations of Nabokov's *Lolita* will be briefly discussed. *Clueless* (1995), another adaptation of *Emma*, is excluded from the discussion here, since it is hardly discussed in its relation to the novel being regarded "a contemporary version" (Lipman, 1995, p. 46) which is 'loosely' based on the novel. The seeming distance from the novel, in spite of

the striking faithfulness in terms of narrative structure, makes the film alienated from its source novel, which needs to be dealt with in a different discussion.

I would like to begin with adaptations of work of Jane Austen, which has been celebrated in television series and films. In the 1990's alone, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* have been respectively adapted for film three times; *Persuasion*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Mansfield Park* have also been adapted. I will focus on the films released in the cinema. The reviews of the adaptations invariably provide critical comments on Jane Austen and her work, and attempt to construct the meaning of and value the filmic versions based on prior understanding of the novels. The reviews of both films raise substantial issues concerning the way in which Jane Austen is re-contextualised, which consequentially define the meaning of the film and its relation to its source novel.

One critic has commented that Jane Austen has been objectified and essentialised through the repeated adaptation into television series and films:

as a result of the series of television and film adaptations of her work in the 1980s and 1990s, Austen has become something of a conservative icon in popular culture: a canonical author whose life and work signify English national heritage and all that implies of the past as an idyll of village life in a pre-industrial society, of traditional class and gender hierarchies, sexual propriety and Christian values. (North, 1999, p. 38)

However, the television series and the films are unable to produce meanings;

the meanings are only generated through interpretive re-contextualisation. The objectification and essentialisation of Jane Austen, therefore, is the result not so much of the frequent adaptation into the mass media as of the critical writings interpreting and evaluating the adaptations.

In a review of the film *Emma* from *Sight and Sound*, Austen's *Emma* is regarded as quite meaningless in the context of contemporary society:

Austen wrote about personal relationship with more tact and precise critical intelligence than anyone before or since, and perhaps another reason for the current revival is that we too have become pragmatists about the moral codes needed to negotiate life. Nonetheless, those who set out to adapt Austen nowadays always founder on the same difficulty: it is impossible not to be made uncomfortable by what we, who no longer share her world view, must see as her complacency.

(Matthews, 1996, p. 40)

Thus, the film inevitably has moments of failure as an appropriate adaptation as it attempts to compromise the views of Austen and that of the contemporary audience, which must be essentially incompatible. The reviewer points out that the presentation of the sordid reality of a poor family Emma and Harriet visit in the film, which remains under-described in the novel, makes disharmony in spite of the director's good intentions. He also sees the treatment of the friendship between Emma and Harriet, which subdues the implied inappropriateness concerning the class, as a failure to understand Austen. Gwyneth Paltrow's characterisation of Emma is, however, good enough to

“bring us straight to the cruel heart of Austen’s universe” at some moments.

The novel is seen as a closed world with its own rules and decorum which resists being disturbed. It embodies the period in which it was produced and exists divorced from any other period. Therefore, it is a site to which we are expected to escape when we, being tired of living in “an impolite age”, want “to see good manners” (Ebert, 1996) and to satiate our “hunger for a cosmos secured by good manners” (Kauffmann, 2001, p. 82). It is a world created by Jane Austen, which retains a coherence insular to contemporary times. The novel becomes an object with a limited set of meanings confined to the vision of the novelist and the period it was produced. This ironically reduces the value of the novelist and the work. Maria Corti explains literary value as “sense of perennial contemporaneity and universality produced by a masterpiece” (Corti, 1978, p. 5), thus, “the texts of minor writers” become “less decodable as they move away from the system that first produced them” (Ibid. p. 6). The novelist once regarded as one of those who created “the great tradition” (Leavis, 1948) has now become a ‘minor’ writer, and at the same time the film has become a rather poor attempt to translate the novel to the screen with sporadic access to the meaning of the novel. The literary work in the film reviews is placed back in the old paradigm of literary studies and, paradoxically, dissipated by enduring the potentially significant cultural practice of adaptation.

The critical comments on the novel presented in the review are heavily resonant of Leavisite “moral formalism” (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker,



1997, p. 23-26) which had been the prevalent idea in the studies of English literature until the structuralist interruption. The value of a literary work should be sought in that it promotes “human awareness...against forces of materialism, barbarism, industrialism” (Ibid. p. 25). The moral force of the work is based on its thematic unity and the primary task of literary study was to invent ways of reading the work to disclose, prove, or rather construct its unity.

Antony Easthope uses the term, “modernist reading”, for such kinds of reading in his book *Literary into Cultural Studies* (1991) where he tries to dismantle the traditional paradigm of literary studies and relocate it in the field of cultural studies. He explains that the modernist reading seeks

to demonstrate that all aspects of the text are focused and justified in a point of unity, [and] this mode of reading commits itself to literary value conceived as essence, presuming unity to be given within the text insulated against process of historical change. In thus closing down the text, reading denies the transhistorical function which...constitutes literary value. (p. 60)

The modernist reading is the product of the approach of Leavisit and New Critics. This method has served to sustain the binary, which excludes popular culture as an outside while conserving literary texts as an inside by demonstrating the “transcendence in the canonical object, accrediting the value of the object by showing its unity” (p. 13). Then he argues that such reading has lost its force as it was unable to hold its validity against the poststructuralist onset which entails the whole issues of ideology, gender, psychoanalysis and so

on where the text, the author, and the reader are defined as a function or an effect arising from an existing semiotic system.

### 3.2 Author vs *Auteur*

Another thing that should be noticed in the way literature is re-encased within the old modernist paradigm and stuck in a set of meanings and values is that they are over-determined by the authorship. Film critics tend to attribute the characteristics of the novel solely to the individual talent of the novelist. Clair Monk regards the film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* primarily as confrontation of the director Ang Lee and “England’s most-adapted dead lady novelist” (1996, p. 50). The fact that Ang Lee had never read any of her [Austen’s] books before he was hired to direct the film (Fuller, 1996) highlights that the obsessive awareness of the authorship is rather an invention of the critic.

The excessive veneration toward the author is the Romantic tradition where imagination is the source of writing. Easthope points out that that “[i]n the twentieth century [the] Romantic tradition that the literary text is to be assessed as a significant expression of the imagination of its author becomes dominant in mainstream literary criticism” quoting Coleridge’s “theory of value” that descriptions of the natural world ‘become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion’” (1991, p. 43). The access to the personality of the author behind the text, which overrides the text or the textuality, is the aim of the Romantic reading. The literary work is art that is

clearly distinguished from an artefact and creation that should be differentiated from production.

The reviews tend to produce a reading of the literary work in the Romantic notion. A reviewer finds that “Austen’s language is a pleasure in itself—and that hearing it spoken by an ensemble of actors fully alive to its rhythms, sense and wit is another one” (Matthews, 1996, p. 40). The film is seen as a way of reviving the dead novelist or her genius. The recent success of the film adaptation of Austen’s novels is attributed to “something about the writer’s view of life that appeals to modern audiences” (Berardinelli, 1996). The viability of the film depends on how far the film succeeds in accessing the genius of the author. One critic’s remark on the film adaptation of *Persuasion* plainly reveals such notion:

There’s wonderful, unhurried delicacy about “*Persuasion*,” Roger Mitchell’s adaptation of Jane Austen’s final novel. It’s as if everyone concerned with the production knows that, if given time and patience, Austen’s genius will emerge. Thanks to assured performances, exacting direction and, of course, inspired writing, it does, in subtle, glorious ways. (Howe, 1995)

The preoccupation with authorship keeps the novels strictly as property of the nineteenth century novelist, Jane Austen, which inevitably turns any adaptation into an act of trespass unless it successfully serves to illuminate the power of the individual talent and personality of the author.

However, ironically, the work had been relinquished by the author quite a while ago. Since the linguistic turn, with structuralism where ‘parole’ is subordinated to ‘langue’, the figure of author has been drastically reduced. Furthermore, poststructuralists completely deny the inscription of the author. Roland Barthes renamed work as ‘text’ and divorced it from origin and author. ‘Text’ is an action in language, not an act of intended meaning, hence signals ‘The death of the author’ (1977). Foucault shares the same idea in his own essay titled “What is an Author?”. Writing is not the vehicle for the author’s expression of his / her ideas or emotions, but rather the circulation of language itself: “it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears” (1977, p. 116). The author is moved away from the position of the producer of the text and relocated in the position of the produced. By declaring the author dead, Foucault places the author in a subject position within language or text beside the reader. The notion of the author as a source of meaning is discarded.

Untied from authoritarianism and monistic determinism, text is endowed with openness (toward diverse interpretations) and ambivalence (where diversity and contrariness among interpretations are equally recognised as truth), which is privileged over unity: “good texts are not always the same but always significantly different” (Easthope, 1991, p. 57). However, when a literary text meets a film, it tends to withdraw into the archaic realm of the author and claim a unified thematic stability.

It is interesting to note the issues concerning authorship in the reviews of film adaptations directed by well-known directors with previous success. In these cases, the film is not simply evaluated against the text; the film is strongly identified with the filmmaker and regarded as a site where the filmmaker challenges the writer. The challenge may result in the filmmaker's defeat which becomes a detriment to her/ his career, or victory which reinstates her/ his fame.

The film *The Portrait of a Lady* is a site where Jane Campion confronts Henry James. There is a notion that the canonical novelist is too huge for the director to explore and too profound to understand. However, because of her earlier success with *The Piano*, a success that was characterised as 'artistic' rather than commercial, which have placed her in the group of *auteurs*,<sup>5</sup> the film is analysed in terms of Campion's capacity of understanding and articulating James. The film is described as "great meeting of the minds-- Henry James' richly perceptive "Portrait of a Lady," as filtered through the acute feminist vision of Jane Campion, director of *The Piano*" (Maslin, 1996b). In the review by Stella Bruzzi (1997), the director's name is mentioned almost every time the film is mentioned, and it shows the reviewer turning the film into a 'creation' of the director whether it is good or bad:

what is lacking in Campion's adaptation (and what so disconcertingly shades James's novel) is its intensity. (p. 60);

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<sup>5</sup> Vincendeau labels Campion as "feminist auteur" (2001, p. xviii); Lizzie Franke compares Campion's work with the work of Jane Austen (1996, p. 8).

With Campion's film we are cut off from Isabel by being propelled into the story at Warburton's unsuccessful proposal, from which point onwards Isabel is merely an object of our dispassionate curiosity. Because it lacks a cohesive emotional core, *Portrait* comes across as superficial and fragmented. (Ibid.)

The evaluation and interpretation of the film is strongly related to reading and recognising the director's signature:

Sadomasochism is not the same as detachment, but here it is treated as such, as Campion elects not to enter the sensuous pain of Isabel's marriage but to prioritise her heroine's more straightforward unhappiness.

(Ibid.)

The film is, eventually, defined in terms of the relationship between the two authors, which, in this case, turns one into the apprentice to the other: "*The Portrait of a Lady* displays, for Campion, an uncharacteristic timidity, based on the film's uneasy relationship to the novel." (Ibid.) As the individual talent of each author is brought to central concern, both the novel and the film fossilised into objects whose meaning is not allowed to be extended beyond the historical and authorial boundaries.

Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* is also clearly re-defined by being contested with its cinematic version by a virtuoso, Martin Scorsese (Cook, 1994), who is regarded as an *auteur* (Friedman, 1999; Vincendeau, 2001, p

xviii). In this case, because of the significant status of the director and relatively less significant status of the writer, the confrontation of the two authors is dealt with in a rather different manner. A reviewer even shows disappointment that such a great filmmaker like Scorsese relies heavily on the original source:

Among the qualities we expect from great film-makers is a show of independence, that their works seem sufficient in themselves even as they offer a rich lode of material for interpretation. It's a bit disconcerting, therefore, when the director of *Raging Bull*, *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver*—Ur-texts for contemporary American film-makers—makes his debt to his source material so evident, refusing to define boundaries between original and adaptation. (Taubin, 1993, p. 6?)

The affinity between the novel and the film is regarded as a rather negative feature betraying the lack of autonomy of the filmmaker.

Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* is evaluated as a “remarkably faithful” (Taubin, 1993, p. 6) translation of the novel, even containing a voice-over narration by the writer herself through the voice of Joanne Woodward's:

Scorsese's *Age of Innocence* is suffused with fear of loss, most notably in its striving for period authenticity (always a lost cause) and in its obsession with faithfully reproducing the novel. (Cook, 1994, p. 46)

The faithfulness, however, is not seen as based on the filmmaker's dutiful compulsion to translate the novel, which is the usual case in evaluating film adaptations, but on the common artistic impulse shared between the filmmaker

and the novelist. Scorsese has found “a fellow fetishist in Wharton, whose fascination with fine detail takes social realism to excess” and “they are both artists who study their society with outsiders’ eyes” (Ibid. p. 45). The affinity and compatibility between the writer and the director is taken even to biographical concerns:

In their best-known work, Scorsese and Wharton examine the culture in which they come of age from the perspectives of insiders who were always outsiders. Ambivalence is central to their style. Aware, even as children, that they were unsuited to the gender ideals prescribed them, they each found an identity in art. (Taubin, 1993, p. 9)

In this case, the confrontation of the two authors is evaluated as extremely and unusually productive, and as a result, the film is endowed with equal status with its source novel and valued as ‘art’. Scorsese “embellishes everything with his signature style” (Howe, 1993), and “through some miracle it [the film] is all Wharton, and all Scorsese” (Ebert, 1993b).

However, despite the fact that the film is praised as one of the filmmaker’s artistic successes augmenting his reputation for a virtuosity which shines across different genres, manifesting his ease even in tackling period drama (Cook, 1994, p. 46), in the same manner in which each *Portrait of a Lady* has turned into property of James and Campion respectively, each *Age of Innocence* has become firmly tied to Wharton and Scorsese. Newland Archer, once belonging to Wharton, now belongs to Scorsese as well, victimised not so much by the social conventions as by his own incapacity. Scorsese, unlike Campion,



successfully usurps the novel, imposes his own vision on it and finds the film a place in his own film career: “Once again, Scorsese creates a dark, pessimistic vision of male desire in which woman is never more than an alibi” (Cook, 1994, p. 46). *The Age of Innocence* has now a new boundary of meaning added onto itself.

Yoking a novel with its author also takes places even when a film adaptation of a twentieth century novel, which is located on the edge of postmodernism, is concerned. *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov’s most famous novel, is objectified to the extent to which the novel is characterised with several tangible features that can be picked up by filmmakers. McKinney (1999) in his review of *Lolita*, comparing the two adaptations, one by Stanley Kubrick and the other by Adrian Lyne, claims that each of the two directors takes over a certain feature which unfortunately does not suit his style:

in essence they divide the novel cleanly between them, each taking one cache of riches while leaving the greater treasure...Kubrick’s comedy borrows drama and Lyne’s drama borrows comedy, but both do badly by what if opposite to their natures: poignancy in Kubrick consists of Nelson Riddle music rising to meet an emotion that isn’t there, while humor in Lyne is the smirk of recognition that one of Nabokov’s written lines has been reproduced by the mouth of an actor. (p. 51).

The novel of a “radically unreliable” narrator (McHale, 1987, p. 18) is reconstructed to hold a decidable range of meaning.

One thing that should be noticed here is that the reviewers' obsession with authorship is not confined to the literary work. They also place a great importance on the director of the film, which shows one of the most influential film theories. The auteur theory developed by the Cahiers group shares the same notion with the Romantic concept of authorship in the field of literary studies. It designates the director as the producer of the meaning of a film, which transcends socio-historical context. It is based on "the belief that cinema was an art of personal expression, and that its great directors were as much to be esteemed as the authors of their work as any writer" (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988, p. 105). Its significance in the French New Wave is the way it "demonstrated that renewal in the film industry could come from talented, aggressive young people inspired in large part by the sheer love of cinema" (Bordwell and Thompson, 1990, p. 400), and this has had a long lasting impact so that Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985) claim that Hollywood films constitute a fairly coherent aesthetic tradition which fosters individual creation.

The "sheer love of cinema", which almost sounds like repetition of Coleridge's "predominant passion", is the most abstract and yet most defining element that differentiates the 'artistic' director from the 'commercial'. Therefore, as in the literary studies, *auteurism*, grounded in the commonplaces of the romantic notion of the artist, has been used to distinguish film as art from film as a production, and qualify films to enter the canon of Art. (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988, p. 105; Hayward, 1996, p. 14).

However, inappropriateness of the theory of *auteurism* has been marked out.

Caughie points out that:

the critical shift which *auteurism* effected within the history of film criticism can be seen as...a regressive step precisely at the moment at which romanticism was becoming less secure in other branches of criticism, and in a medium in which an aesthetic of individual self-expression seemed least appropriate. (1981, p. 11).

The theory has been critiqued for its indifference to socio-historical context and displaced by the structuralist issues and historical materialism. In addition, when it is deployed it can exert a power which, rather than saving film which is at the risk of being discarded because of its nonconformity to commercial demands, can turn into a delimiting force: like that of literary Romanticism, it can curtail film's openness toward diverse readings. Concerning adaptation, in particular, it seems to be employed in the extensive manner so that a film is strictly defined by the individuality of the director at best, which overrides or is subsumed to that of the novelist.

### **3.3 Novel vs Film**

When a film is directed by a less significant, or non-auteur filmmaker, then the genre or the producing body overrides the authorship. Thus, the writer of the source novel is confronted by the whole mechanism of commercial movie making. The reviews of *The Adventures of Huck Finn*, an adaptation of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, would make an interesting comparison with the reviews discussed above. Some reviews start with a definite evaluation of the

novel, recounting its canonicity in American literary tradition, quoting Hemingway's remark that all modern American literature comes from a book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. (Ebert, 1993a; Macnab, 1994) Macnab poses a presumptuous claim that the qualities of the novel would not easily translate to any film. The rest of his review is primarily spent explicating the ways in which the film fails to translate the novel, or Mark Twain. The novel is almost identified with the novelist and the narrative style is said to be ultimately impossible to emulate. Ebert spends more than half his review explaining the novel and his experience of (reading) it and comments that the film lacks the depth of the novel.

What should be noticed here that the 'lesser-ness' of the film is attributed not so much to the director as to Disney: the film is placed within the tradition of Disney production, not within the creative realm of the director in this case:

The Disney version may stick closer to the original narrative than most of its predecessors, but at times it risks embalming Twain's fable by treating it with the same fussy reverence as the BBC in their Jane Austen adaptations. (Macnab, 1994)

The relative insignificance of the filmmaker gives the film away to Disney. The greatest failure of the film lies in that it has been appropriated to the style of Disney, a "cosy moralising" of the story. Macnab comments that it contradicts Twain's intention revealed in his preface to the novel, in which he discourages a reading of the novel that seeks for a motive, a moral, or a plot. *Huckleberry Finn*, an asset of Mark Twain (Ibid.) and the American literary tradition is

inappropriately borrowed and used by a modern commercial film producing company which has a reputation “for watering down subjects that may cause controversy” (Berardinelli, 1993a).

Crediting the production of the film to Disney, the reviews insinuate the binary opposition between the literary canon and popular culture, the high and the low culture. The literary text, especially the canonical, originates from creativity and imaginative power, which must derive from a talented individual, while the text of popular culture does not. The critique of the film, for the ways in which it risks “embalming” the novel, in which Jim and Huck are “sentimentalised”, attributing those errors to Disney, conveys the attitude that the film industry has encroached upon and destroyed the artistic terrain of literature.<sup>6</sup> This is insidiously resonant of Adorno’s depreciating remarks on film:

Whatever problems of psychological fate the film may present, through parading the events past the viewer on the screen the power of the oppositions involved and the possibility of freedom within them is denied and reduced to the abstract temporal relationship of before and after. The eye of the camera which has perceived the conflict before the viewer and projected it upon the unresistingly smoothly unfolding reel of film has already taken care that the conflicts are not conflicts at all.

(1991, p. 62)

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Axelrod (1996) strongly asserts that literary texts are severely reduced to a story line with rounded characters and linear story development through adaptation and adaptation is essentially a process of commodification.

The incapacitation of cinematic performance comparing to superiority of literature in terms of presenting psychological complexity becomes apparent in many reviews. This constructs the binary opposition between literature and film, one belonging to high art and the other popular culture, is that literature is more complex than film: literature seems to be defined with subtlety and implicitness which are seen as its major characteristics, whereas film seems to be characterised by its simplicity and explicitness. Kenneth Turan, a Times film critic, comments in his review of *Persuasion* that the difficulty for filmmakers in adapting stories like *Persuasion* is that “Austen’s world was not known for frank speech or dramatic action” (1995a) and points out the filmmaker of *Persuasion* was right to capture “a nuanced society of looks and smiles, where more is implied than spoken”.

The indirectness and implicitness appears to be construed as characteristics of every novel in reviews. The same critic criticises adaptations of Henry James’s novels for the same reason:

lack of subtlety in “Washington Square” is especially troubling because James was a writer to whom nuance and inference were everything. (Turan, 1997a).

He repeatedly emphasises the gulf between the subtleties of the novel between the relative simplicity of the film:

“Washington Square’s” determination to make its story as simple-minded as possible is its great drawback. Though the argument could be made that Catherine’s fate is subtly handled, the film’s eagerness to spell

everything out in capital letters would probably make James cringe.

(Ibid.)

He offers almost identical account on *The Wings of the Dove*:

this is inevitably a stripped-down version of James, with the novel's plot pared away and rerouted and everything so plainly stated that James purists are likely to get all huffy if they even bother to see the film at all.

(Turan, 1997b)

Another critic reviewing the same film also points out that Kate's plan involving Millie and Merton is more clearly stated in the film:

This scheme unfolds only gradually in the James novel, emerging from behind leisurely screens of dialogue and implication. It is more clear in the film, especially in a dark, atmospheric scene where Kate and Merton walk down deserted Venetian passages. (Ebert, 1997b)

Janet Maslin's comments on *The Portrait of a Lady* are strikingly similar to examples above:

So much social observation and psychological texture has been stripped from this story that the characters lose their rough edges. Try as she may, Ms. Campion has no substitute for the Jamesian freeze-frame, in which the author halts the action and devotes thousands of words to analyzing every last aspect of whatever has transpired. (Maslin, 1996b)

As a result the film which definitely lacking "the intellectual dazzle" of the novel is reduced to "a quaint 19<sup>th</sup>-century 'Dating Game' with adoring bachelors appearing at every turn" (Ibid.)

Roger Ebert attributes the failure of the film adaptation of *Ethan Frome* to its failure to capture the “quiet passion” of Edith Wharton and to its simple trust that “the story and the acting will interest us” (1993b). Rita Kempley (1993) also asserts that the character of Ethan Frome, “a man torn between self-satisfaction and scruples” in the novel, turns into a man who is just challenged “libidinally” in the film. McKinney (1999) mentions that each version of *Lolita* reveals the moviemakers’ avoidance of and inability to engage a complexity in theme, performance and psychology of the novel.

Literature is privileged, in a film discourse, by being characterised with openness or plurality, through a range vocabulary that points to qualities like abstractness, complexity, and connotation; film is confined to the exactly opposite qualities. This is revealed in a most interesting manner in an academic essay on Jane Campion. Writing on the case of *The Piano*, where the book is the subsequent product of the film, Ken Gelder comments that:

it is unusual to come across a case where a film is seen as more complex, nuanced and worthy of sustained 'literary' critique than the novel to which it is attached. In Campion's next project, a 1996 adaptation of Henry James's novel *The Portrait of Lady* (1881), quite the opposite would seem to be true: that such a great novel would inevitably remain more complex and nuanced than the film. (1999, p. 157).

The clear notion of hierarchy concerning or defining the intrinsic quality of literature and film seems pervasive and immanent.



However, the analysis of the ways in which classic novels are recontextualised in the reviews has revealed an interesting case of self-contradiction: such hierarchical notions between literature and film are undone within the same discourse. As we have seen in the reviews discussed above, meaning of novels are constructed in two contradictory ways: novels are made into art of complexity and subtlety, yet at the same time they are confined to a set of immutable meanings, thus the novelists are deprived of the possibility to be placed “at the crossroads between the sociocultural sign system of [its] age and the indecipherability and profound ambiguity of the real” (Corti, 1978, p. 109). Film criticism of adaptations of literary work stands on a very feeble ground of self-paradox. The logocentric belief that the source novel has a stabilised and consensual meaning or authorial intention that is insular to historical and social diversity, which the deviations of the adaptations can reinforce or contradict, makes the literary work go through severe objectification. This inevitably delimits any adaptation to an act of ontological and epistemological violation. As a result both the literary work and the film are mortified and dissipated failing and fail to produce any cultural significance from the interaction.

## **4 Film Reviewing**

Through the analysis of reviews of film adaptations of literary works which particularly belong to the literary canon, we have seen the ways in which the meaning of the literary work is constructed and placed in a particular relationship with the film adaptation: the meaning is essentialised to the extent that a novel is encased within a set of immutable and transcendent meanings which has to be transferred and realized in the filmic version as well. In this chapter I'll focus on the practice of film reviewing, where adaptations of canonical work appear to be discriminated from other films in the ways in which they are explained in reviews. That a film has a literary origin based on a canonised novel tends to make reviewers apply principles and rules different from those they normally use to evaluate film. Comparing two kinds of review writing, one of adaptations of classic novels and the other of films without literary origin, will reveal that adaptations are encumbered with the accumulated discourses of the traditional literary studies, and this ultimately marginalize adaptations within the film discourses.

### **4.1 Reviews in General**

Film reviewing is different from academic film criticism primarily in that it serves a wide and, more importantly, varied audience through being published in newspapers and weekly magazines. It has an aspect of consumer reporting in that one of its essential tasks is to provide information on a film, such as what the film is about, who is starring in it, a description of the plot and the general

tone of the movie, and some technical details. In addition it usually has an educational function in that it guides and teaches how to appreciate the film and what to look for in it. Another important task of reviewing is to evaluate the film, whether it is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, worthwhile seeing or not.

However, the most salient feature, in terms of textuality, is the subjective nature of reviews. Apart from the moments where information about a film is given, film reviews are naturally subjective. Pauline Kael, a very well known film reviewer and critic who wrote for *The New Yorker*, has commented on what necessitates the subjective nature of reviewing:

There are not—and there never were—any formal principles that can be used to judge movies but there are concepts that are serviceable for a while and so pass for, or are mistaken for, “objective” rules until it becomes obvious that the new work that we respond to violates them.

(1967, 1968, p.

6).

Thus evaluation is generally and overtly based on the personal opinions of reviewers and this makes most reviews open to response and discussion—even a self-importantly authoritarian voice might provoke the response of rejection. “It is not uncommon for a reviewer/ critic to be regarded as a particular kind of personality, whose particular biases and personal characteristics are revealed in the writing” (Bywater and Sobchack, 1989, p. 11).

It is this subjective nature that constructs a peculiar relation between the author

and the reader, which distinguishes film reviews from other forms of journalistic or academic writing. Use of the first person makes the statements vulnerable to other voices. As a medium between a film and the audience, reviews are the site where a film is recontextualised, particularly in terms of its relation to the audience. Reviews construct the audience-ship rather than respond to the audience. The significance of a review can be fully realised when the ways in which the relation between the author and the reader/audience is constructed.

For such a task, Dowling's *Social Activity Theory* will be useful to understand reviews as texts as social relations and cultural practices which (re)produce them. "Essentially, the object text cannot stand on its own. Rather, it is always read as an instance of something else. That is to say, the text is always contextualised by a referent game or activity that constructs authors and readers in specific ways" (Dowling, 1999, p. 2). He suggests that the relation between the author and the reader exhibits two types of relationship: pedagogic and exchange modes. They differ in respect of "the location of the principles of evaluation of the practice": the principles are located with the author in pedagogic mode, while the principles are located with the audience in exchange mode. (Dowling, 2001, p. 3)

Film reviews can be largely described as an 'exchange' site in their construction of the relation between the author and the reader. The knowledge and information provided in reviews are to be recruited by the audience to

generate their own discourses. Not only the factual and technical information about a film, but also the personal opinions of the reviewer are presented in a way in which they can be incorporated into the voice of the audience. Bordwell's explanation of the critics's strategy concerning different voices is relevant. Bordwell explains that the critic creates "identificatory roles around which the reader's emotions can crystallize" (1989, p. 207). One is the role of "the constructed reader", "a kind of parallel to the rhetor's own persona" and the other role is that of "mock viewer", "the hypothetical spectator who responds in the fashion best suited to the critic's interpretation" (Ibid.). However, the rhetor's persona, the mock viewer, and the constructed reader are merged into a single unity by the critic's use of "we".

Many reviews show that the critic presents himself as a participant in a discussion rather than an authority laying down objective rules about films. The critic often sees himself as a passionate lover of film rather than as someone asserting immutable principles about what is good or bad. Characteristics describing 'good' critics are a combination of intellectual attitude, expression of affection for the average movie-goer, and readiness to communicate with the audience. (Bywater and Sobchack, 1989) The critic tends to try to engage the readers as equals. Frequent use of "I" and "we" presents a movie and the discussion as a shared experience.

A noticeable strategy to devolve the principles to the audience is to delimit and define the discussion to the generic specificities of the film, since genre is "one

of the principal components of the film's discourse system through which the particular themes of the film can be articulated" (Phillips, 1996, p. 139). Discussions of a film, be it romance, melodrama, action, thriller, horror or SF, primarily revolve around key features which constitute the generic specificity of the film. A film is identified, usually at the very beginning, with one, or sometimes more genres. *Pretty Woman* (1990) is identified as "the sweetest and most openhearted love fable since *The Princess Bride*" (Ebert, 1990). *The Matrix* (1999) is defined as "a visually dazzling cyberadventure, full of kinetic excitement" (Ebert, 1999). *The Usual Suspects* (1995b) is described as "the most satisfyingly close-textured thriller for years" (Kemp, 1995, p. 61). The audience is guided concerning what they should see and look for in the film in order to understand it.

When a critic says that a film "retreats to formula just when it's getting interesting" (Ebert, 1999), the audience is expected to mobilise their knowledge about the typical patterns of the genre of the film in question. The knowledge is what is acquired through repeated engagement with reviews that deal with films of the same genre. However, the acquirement does not necessarily involve a form of pedagogic practice, since the knowledge is usually presented in a colloquial way. For example one of those moments of improbability constituting action films is explained in terms of the audience's reaction: "Can a bus really leap a 50-foot space? This is the kind of movie where you don't ask questions like that" (Ebert, 1994).

Another strategy found in film reviews, which contributes to the construction of an ‘exchange mode’ between the author and the audience is to place the discussion and explanation in an empirico-experiential context. The experience is mostly linked with pleasure and the pleasure is closely related with the functions and effects of the generic feature of a film. Understanding of a film is articulated through description of sensory experience.

Even a film with an extremely complicated narrative and verbal structure like *The Usual Suspects* is recontextualised in terms of the experience of the audience. Kenneth Turan (1995b), a *Los Angeles Times* critic, gives a review of the film which heavily focuses on the empirico-experiential dimension of the film. He claims that *The Usual Suspects* is “a maze that moviegoers will be happy to get lost in, a criminal roller coaster with twists so unsettling no choice exists but to hold on and go along for the ride”. He continues, “Soon everyone is wondering what is real, what is imaginary, and what exactly is going on?” He ends his review saying “Don’t expect to completely follow the plot after the first viewing, or maybe even after the second”. The formal and narrative ingenuity of the film is explained in ways in which it may emotionally engage the audience.

Identification with the characters is also encouraged. A critic reviewing *You’ve Got Mail*, a romantic comedy, comments:

You can believe Kathleen when, under her log-on ID Shopgirl, she tells Joe’s NY152 that the “You’ve got mail” greeting makes her heart jump.

And you can feel their anxiety, and their anonymous relationship warms up to the point where they think they should meet. (Mathews, 1998)

Ebert (1990) invites the audience at the beginning of his review of *Pretty Woman* to be immediately involved in the film: “Here is a movie that could have marched us down mean streets into the sinks of iniquity, and it glows with romance”.

The audience is quite straightforwardly invited to look into and experience a film. Direct access to the film is suggested and emotional involvement is encouraged. The information about the film does not seem to constitute privileged discourse as it focuses on factual data. It is usually used to facilitate and articulate expected pleasure. The audience is often identified with the author and asked to participate in (hypothetical) viewing of a film. Bourdieu’s ‘popular aesthetic’ is resonant in the ways in which the audience is constructed in the relation to film. The ‘popular aesthetic’ is ‘based on a continuity between art and life’, a similarity between ‘ordinary dispositions’ and aesthetic ones. It stresses functions rather than form. It promotes desire to participation and to enter the fictional world. (1984, pp. 32-4)

Film reviews construct an ‘exchange’ relation between the author and the audience transferring the center of the discourse to the latter: they are “writerly” texts. Besides, they place a film and the audience in an exchange mode, constructing experience of the audience as a site where the significance and value of the film ultimately resides.



## 4.2 Reviews of Adaptations

Reviews of adaptations of canonical novels appear to operate according to different protocols. Unlike the ordinary film reviews discussed above, reviews of adaptations essentially place the reader/audience in a ‘pedagogic’ relationship, where principles of discourse are placed with the author. We understand the term ‘pedagogy’

to mean those practices which concern the transmission and acquisition of privileged discourses, techniques, dispositions and comportments...the relationship between transmitter and acquirer is hierarchical in that the principles of evaluation of pedagogic content reside with the transmitter” (Dowling, 1998, p. 1).

The authority of the authorial voice is initially established through restrained use of the first person, which primarily marks out the reviews of films of classic novels from that of other films. Avoiding the first person makes the opinions of the author appear to be of unquestioned authority. Therefore what is provided in the reviews rather rigidly remains as authorial command, both in content and in the way it is presented.

Bordwell (1989) explains that the practice of film criticism conforms to a set of institutionalised conventions and explicates the general structure of film criticism. He claims that film criticism is essentially a rhetorical activity and shows it can be analysed into processes characteristic of all kinds of rhetorical activity, which are ‘*inventio*’, ‘*dispositio*’, and ‘*elocutio*’. *Inventio* is the

process by which the critic presents his arguments; *dispositio* involves the arrangement of the arguments into an appealing order; *elocutio* concerns the critic's own stylistic features. It is *inventio* that is most concerned here. The critic establishes himself/ herself with an ethos displaying a range of knowledge about the film, director, the genre, and so on. Through these ethos-centred appeals is created the critic's persona—"a role" and "a set of attributes". The critic assumes the role of partisan, judge, or analyst and characterise his voice with rigor, fairness, or erudition. Reviews of adaptations show a closeness in formal pattern to this generalised structure of film criticism.

Reviews of film adaptations of classical literary works tend to show a distinctive feature in *inventio*. Most critics commenting on film adaptation based on canonical texts invariably establish their expertise in literary criticism prior to displaying of their knowledge about the film. Stella Bruzzi asserts that

Sadomasochism is an integral part of James's writing style as well as his narrative; he draws us into identifying with the wilful Isabel in the first third of the novel through implausibly detailed descriptions of her every move, only to then elide and deny us access to many of the significant events in her life once the action gains momentum. (1997, p. 60)

A reviewer of the film *The Scarlet Letter* provides an interpretation of the novel based on a biographical approach:

Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is a novel about the price of sin. Hester and Dimmesdale sin and are punished for it. Hawthorne was wrestling

with his moral inheritance, with the dark anger that the Puritans brought to North America. (Harkness, 1996, p. 49)

He even rejects some other possible readings of the novel: “He was not concerned with establishing Hester Prynne as some sort of feminist heroine.” (Ibid.) Furthermore, he gives an account of the history of the religious heritage of America, which supports and justifies his interpretation of the novel:

The religious freedom sought in the American colonies was often the freedom to establish one’s own theocratic community—the Puritans in Pennsylvania, the Catholics in Maryland. A person does not arrive in the Massachusetts colony in the middle of the seventeenth-century looking for the freedom to worship as she chooses. (Ibid.)

The reviews are heavily encumbered with literary criticism and the authorial voice is charged with erudition.

Reviews of adaptations also provide critical comments on the general style and thematic orientation of an individual writer that goes beyond the novel concerned in that particular review. Peter Matthews (1996) displays a fair amount of confidence in his knowledge about Jane Austen, claiming that “Austen was certainly no radical”, and that “Austen wrote about personal relationship with more tact and precise critical intelligence than anyone before or since”. Turan (1995)<sup>7</sup> gives a similar account of Austen with no less confidence than Matthews:

few writers have had a more acute sense of romantic psychology, or had

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Turan, who is a *Los Angeles Times* film critic, is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Jane Austen Society of North America.

more piercing insights into the relationship of people in love. No place in the human heart was unknown to her, which is why her popularity not only endures, but increases.

A reviewer's comment can even go beyond the stylistic and thematic concerns of an individual writer commenting on literary history. Explanations of *Huckleberry Finn* involves the significance of its linguistic and thematic novelty in the history of American literature:

*Huckleberry Finn* is, above all, a masterpiece of the vernacular: its use of slang and dialect, and its choice of a raw country boy as hero and narrator, went a long way towards freeing American fiction from the constraints of English literary language" (Macnab, 1994, p. 34)

Roger Ebert declares that "It is the first great novel to be told in American vernacular, and it is the first great novel to deal honestly and decently with the subject of race relations" (Ebert, 1993a)

The literary knowledge offered in reviews can be far more specialised to the extent that a literary critic is quoted. Kauffman, in his review of *Sense and Sensibility*, starts with Lionel Trilling's remarks on the novel and explains the film in the terms of the literary critic:

Lionel Trilling might have been pleased with at least one aspect of *Sense and Sensibility*. In his essay 'Why We Read Jane Austen', he names her visual sense as one of her chief attributes, then says, 'Notable among the elements of visuality...is that of *scale*, the relation in size between

human beings and the components of their environment' (2001, p. 80).

Kauffmann comments that the film establishes the 'scale' very well, juxtaposing the conversation between John Dashwood and his wife on the portion of his inheritance which ought to be given to his stepmother and her daughter, and the shots of the landscape, where their shrinking generosity is contrasted with the immense scale of the landscape they're traversing. (Ibid.)

The audience is placed in a literary discourse where she/ he is given literary knowledge of various degree of specialty about the source novel. However, the knowledge is something which cannot be recruited by the audience since it is what is produced by institutionalised education. The relationship between the audience and the author is predominantly in objectification mode as the pedagogic action hardly distributes any potential authorship to the audience. The commentary concerning the novels is presented as specialised discourse which requires educational cultural capital or a disposition acquired through the domestic or scholastic education of legitimate culture (Bourdieu, 1984) to engage in it.

Ebert, commenting on *Wings of the Dove*, says that "[t]here is, if you know how to look for it, incredible emotional violence in the work of Henry James" (1997b). He also says, "I assume that most of the people going to see this movie (*The Portrait of a Lady*) will have read the book, and, frankly, you can't easily understand this film if you haven't. Too much is left out, glossed over, or implied." (1997a) It invalidates part of the audience's voice constituting a

prior knowledge as a prerequisite for the reading/ viewing. Janet Maslin (1996b), the *New York Times* critic, hierarchizes the audience differentiating their levels of understanding of the protagonist of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel Archer:

Although it will resonate most deeply with viewers who already know Isabel Archer, James' headstrong and much-admired young heroine, this film presents a more timid-seeming Isabel than the one found on the page.

Turan's (1996) comment on *The Portrait of a Lady* conveys the same notion:

This "Portrait of a Lady" and its melancholy tale of emotional manipulation and despair belongs as much to her as to James, a situation that may upset the author's devotees but will not be noticed by viewers who haven't made the novel's acquaintance.

The importance of educational cultural capital to understand a literary work is explicitly stated in a review of *Persuasion*:

In bringing Austen to the screen, Michell who was born in South Africa, studied at Cambridge and worked extensively with the Royal Shakespeare Company before moving to film hasn't lost sight of what makes the author great in the first place: her mercilessly acute sense of social satire. (Hinson, 1995)

It is inferred that the director's educational engagement with the academically and culturally privileged institutions enabled the director to understand the novel correctly and to produce a better movie.

The authorial voice overtly delivers authority to the extent that it defines the relationship between the audience and the film. The audience is refused direct access to the film. The film is recontextualised in terms of literary discourse and objectified along with the novel. The canonicity of the source text overrides the filmic genre which is romantic comedy or/ and drama in most cases. The usual attention that is expected to be given a romantic comedy is hardly discussed, such as the plausibility of the relationship, the probability of happy ending, etc.

The ways in which in which the audience is to be engaged with a film of a novel appear to be different from that with other films in that distancing and a denial of direct emotional engagement is emphasised, form rather than function is valued, and artistic effects rather than content is stressed. A film is discussed via analysis of its source novel, whose aesthetic unity and value has already been crystallised in various ways. The emotional access to the film is discouraged. Film viewing is constructed as aesthetic experience rather than entertainment. A critic claims that the “sublime” pleasure of watching *The Age of Innocence* is “to experience [the film] through the eyes of Martin Scorsese” (Howe, 1993), which then implies that the pleasure is reserved for those who are able to discern and appreciate the particular style of the director. The distinction between aesthetic experience and entertainment is subtly projected, if not unconsciously, in the comment of another critic: “I recommend...heartily ...*The Age of Innocence*, which has the rare distinction of being more of a

cinematic experience than a simple movie" (Berardinelli, 1993b). The term 'cinematic experience' is unavoidably reverberates the 'high aesthetic' experience by being placed against 'a simple movie' as its contrasting concept.

Though a review occasionally suggests a direct and emotional engagement with the film, it is restricted to an experience that is related to moral and ethical awareness, in one way or another, which transcends all other kinds of emotions and pleasure. Besides, the moral and ethical sensibility is usually sought in the authorial realm of the source novel. Ebert, trying to bring the audience and the film *The Portrait of a Lady* to the experiential terms, goes back to the novelist and writes:

The value of Henry James is that he teaches us to consider our motives....James' people think before they commit. When they choose wrong, they eventually learn how, and why. (1997a)

He also asserts, in his review of *The Wings of the Dove*, that moral and ethical messages are the central attractions of the literary adaptations and what makes the audience engage in the film:

The reason we're so fascinated by the adaptations of James, Forster and the others is that their characters think marriage, fidelity, chastity and honesty are important. In modern movies, the characters have no values at all." (1997b)

The audience constructed here is obviously different from that in the reviews of "modern movies" such as *Speed*, *The Matrix*, or *The Pretty Woman*. The audience looks for moral realisation rather than entertainment.



The experience of the audience with the film ultimately turns into an experience with the novel and the authorial intention of the novelist. With the film *The Age of Innocence*, the audience are invited to identify with the characters, but not without moral sense:

By the end, we realize these people have all the same emotions, passions, fears and desires that we do. It is simply that they value them more highly and are less careless with them, and do not in the cause of self-indulgence choose a moment's pleasure over a lifetime's exquisite and romantic regret. (Ebert, 1993b)

Peter Matthews (1996) praises Sophie Thompson's characterisation of Miss Bates because her acting enables us to reach "the cruel heart of Austen's universe". The characters are the means through which the audience experience the personality of the novelist. Bruzzi's complaint that watching Campion's *The Portrait of Lady* is "a largely cold, alienating experience" (1997, p. 60) is based not so much on that it is difficult to be emotionally involved in the film, as that it fails to provide the intense experience of the James's novel. It implies that a passionate and involving experience with the film would need sensibility or an educated mind to understand and appreciate the 'Jamesian intensity'.

Film is seen as alienated from the audience as it is deemed mainly as a pathway leading to the realm of its source novel. A film is strictly regarded as a representation of a novel, which is a representation of a writer's idea and intention, which is a representation of reality. Thus, a critic says, "I hope the

movie guides more people toward the book—which contains values that sometimes seem as rare today as when Jim was first teaching them to Huck” (Ebert, 1993a). Placing both the film and the novel in extra-semiotic terrain, textuality is out of concern. One regular practice is that when the reviewers explain the plot of the film, they tend to use the real names of the actors and actresses, while in the review of the film adaptation, they use the fictional names of the novel, keeping the real names in parentheses unless they try to talk about the performance of the actors and actresses. Using the real names of the stars facilitates the connection between the film and real life, hence between the film and the audience. However, in the reviews of adaptations, although big stars do get attention and are still key attractions of the film, it is very rare that they are credited for creative performance rather than for ‘appropriate’ portrayal of the assigned fictional character defined by the novelist. Julia Roberts is complemented for her acting in *Pretty Woman* in terms of uniqueness and individuality: “Roberts's memorably comic performance that is the most distinguishing aspect of the movie. As the gawky professional companion, she's ticklishly appealing” (Howe, 1990); whereas, Gwyneth Paltrow is assessed as an actress “who gives face, form and expression to Emma”, and complemented for “display[ing] the essential characteristic of an actress wishing to play a Jane Austen heroin—the ability to shift quickly and effectively from comedy to drama” (Berardinelli, 1996)

Literature and film are placed in separate domains and these are hierarchized. A review presents an interesting example. James Berardinelli (1995b), in his

review of *Sense and Sensibility*, reveals that he distinguishes film and literature as two different kinds of discourses. He begins the review with a critical evaluation of Jane Austen's novels, in which he claims that *Sense and Sensibility* "displays an undeniable shallowness" with half-developed themes, uneven characterization and a straightforward plot, compared to other novels such as *Persuasion* and *Emma* where the human soul is profoundly explored with "characters and situations of greater versatility and vitality". Then he shows a self-reflective and apologetic feeling about assuming the role of literary critic assessing his own remark with "[t]hat's more in the nature of literary criticism than a film review".

The hierarchical notion appears to have its effect in discriminating films with non-literary origin from literary adaptations. The reviewing practices of film adaptations of canonical literary works show that the influence of the institution of literature still ranges beyond its own disciplinary confines and that film reviewing contributes to form the public complicity that fosters the prestige and sustains the charismatic authority of literary practice. The difference in the construction of the audience in relation to the reviews and films, one as an exchange relation and the other as a pedagogic one, demarcate not only literature and film but also films of novels and other films, as two different kinds of art, 'high' and 'popular', which reverberates in the word of Bourdieu: "Audience participation is the crucial thing distinguishing popular entertainment from more bourgeois varieties—in the latter participation is 'distant highly ritualised'" (1984, p. 488). Confining the reader/ audience of

film to visceral and sensory experience and that of literature to cerebral and intellectual inevitably marginalize literary adaptations alienating them from their own generic ground, popular culture; this ultimately delimits the boundary of film art.

## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 *Clueless* and *The Golden Bowl*

I would like to briefly look at reviews of two more film adaptations. One is *Clueless* (1995), another adaptation of the novel *Emma*, which was released a few months ahead of the film of *Emma*, and which is excluded from the discussion in the second chapter. The reason it is excluded is that in most reviews of the film, the novel is quite left out from the discussion, thus no recontextualisation of the novel takes place as in the reviews of *Emma*. This points to another question concerning adaptations.

*Clueless* resurfaces *Emma* transporting the story to contemporary L. A. and peopling it with Beverly Hill teenagers talking their own lingo. In spite of the superficial deviations which transpose the film into a different genre, teen movie or “teen comedy” (Berardinelli, 1995a), from the other adaptation which is costume drama and romantic comedy, *Clueless* faithfully translates the novel in terms of characterisation and action to the extent to which most characters and incidents of the film can be matched with their parallels from the book.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the film even appears to be quite faithful to the ‘spirit’ of the novel, so a critic comments, “[t]he film contains a plethora of humorous details which echo the lady novelist’s refined but stringent satire” (Lipman, 1995, p.

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<sup>8</sup> Details of parallels between the novel and the film can be found at a website dedicated to Jane Austen, <http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/clueless.html>. Especially, a paper written by an undergraduate student gives an extensive comparison between the novel and film, which is found at <http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/maclulss.html>.

46).

However, most reviews of *Clueless* show a significant lack of concern for its source novel, which presents a salient contrast to the reviews of other film adaptations where source novels are placed at the centre of discussion. Most of Amanda Lipman's account of the relation of the film to the source book, although she offers a relatively larger portion of comments compared to the other reviewers, are confined to simply pointing out a few parallel elements between the two. Berardinelli only mentions that the film is "contemporary reworking of Jane Austen's *Emma*" (1995a). Other reviewers hardly mention anything about the book.<sup>9</sup>

This indicates an unsaid discrimination between two kinds of adaptations, 'costume drama', 'period piece' or 'heritage cinema' and 'contemporary version' or "pop version" (Maslin, 1996a). Faithful representation of the geographical, social, and historical elements of the source novel seems to be counted as the primary condition that places a film in a legitimate relation to the book as an 'adaptation'. This seriously curtails the range of significance of one of the most popular cinematic practices, which consequently invalidates meaningful aspects of a film like *Clueless* by severing it from its inspirational root.

Another interesting case is a review of a very recent adaptation of one of Henry

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<sup>9</sup> 'Other reviewers' here include Ebert, R. (*Chicago Sun-Times*), Stack, P. (*San Francisco Chronicle*), Brown, J. and Hinson, H. (*Washington Post*).

James's novels, *The Golden Bowl* (2000). The reviewer states that her approach to the film should be different from that of "literary-minded critics" who would judge the film "in terms of its 'faithfulness' to the book", since her goal of reviewing simply lies in enquiring, "how good a movie is it?" (Vincendeau, 2000, p. 52).

She begins her review identifying the generic feature of the film: the film is in a line of heritage productions by the Merchant-Ivory team and belongs to "the growing canon of Henry James adaptations". Then she explains some "intrinsic" characteristics of heritage cinema such as "spectacular *mise en scène*, painstakingly researched decors and objects, wonderful performances by stellar casts". In this aspect, she evaluates the film as a success, especially in that the spectacles are integrated to the narrative in a sophisticated manner. However, her overall judgement is that the film is less than satisfying because of a lack of integrity of the narrative structure, some underdeveloped relations between characters and weak performance of some stars.

She attempts to explain and evaluate the film in purely cinematic terms and it seems successful as long as the independence of the film is concerned, without being subordinated to a prescribed meaning by the book. However, it ultimately devalues the film by alienating it from its source, which denies its own generic identity, adaptation. The purism based on the resistance against the literary encroachment upon film dismisses the literature that already constitutes intrinsic part of a filmic production as its primary inspirational

source, which consequentially denies the act of adaptation itself.

The examination of the reviews of both films shows that constructing a film adaptation in its own right by repudiating its relation to its source novel is possible only at the expense of annihilating the particular generic origin of the film itself, the hybridity, and the significance arising from it. Adaptation can be recognised as a meaningful cultural practice only when the two constituents are understood and explained to function and interact with each other in the utmost capacity.

## **5.2 Towards a New Paradigm**

As we have seen in the books discussed in the literature review section, the study of film adaptation of literary texts has not made impressive progress since the first book-length attempt of Bluestone in 1957, *Novel into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema*. The predominant contrast-comparison approach has kept the relationship of literature and film defined only in terms of translatability as the potential meaning and value of both literature and film is subordinated to the specificities of each medium, and, therefore, faithfulness of a film towards its source text becomes an inevitable concern, whatever end a discussion aspires to reach. The studies critiquing the dilemmatic situation have also not come up with a convincing alternative argument. Although they have succeeded, to some extent, in unfolding the social, cultural and political background from which the existing debate has been sustained, they have hardly succeeded in suggesting a way to dismantle the current situation and



open a new discussion which explains film adaptation as a meaningful cultural practice.

Suggesting that one of the difficulties for the existing debates is that they still remain in the domain where a meaning can be closed on a signified, so an act of reading/ watching a work (not a 'text') is to decipher the meaning rather than to produce a meaning, I have shown the ways in which the meaning of literature and film is constructed and fostered in discourses around film adaptations, particularly through analysing reviews. The analyses have revealed the falsity and the inappropriateness of the discourses around film adaptations. First, a novel is (re)contextualised as a work of unity created by an individual genius, which inevitably prescribes the meaning of its film adaptation and constructs the film as inferior to the novel. However, this only results in devaluation of the novel as the novel is deprived of the viability that stems only from plurality and indeterminacy of the meaning, and this paradoxically invalidates the hierarchical notion on which the discussions are based. Secondly, the practice of film reviewing is shown to apply the notion of high art and popular art to literature and film, and to films based on literary work and other films. This delimits the field of film art by discriminating a large portion of film productions as high art, which ultimately devalues film by depreciating the nature of 'popular' culture.

The revelation of the paradoxical nature of the discourses points to the place outside the old domain. Ironically, literature moved away from the old terrain

quite a while ago. Literary studies began to liberate itself and literature from the 'regime of truth' of the New Critics and the Leavisites three decades ago, through the workings of poststructuralists such as Derrida and the later Barthes. Foucault (1980) pushed it even further to where there is no 'truth' of knowledge in the absolute sense -- a truth is a discursive formation sustaining 'a regime of truth', i.e. there is only what is counted as truth. Thus, Terry Eagleton claims:

My own view is that it is most useful to see 'literature' as a name which people give from time to time for different reasons to certain kinds of writing within a whole field of what Michel Foucault has called 'discursive practices', and that if anything is to be an object of study it is this whole field of practices rather than just those sometimes rather obscurely labelled 'literature'. I am countering the theories set out in this book not with a literary theory, but with a different kind of discourse -- whether one call it of 'culture', -- which would include the objects ('literature') with which these other theories deal, but which would transform them by setting them in a wider context. (1983, p. 205)

The site is where the 'exchange' mode is the governing principle. The encounter of literature and film can generate exciting and productive meaning where they are regarded equally as the "text" engendered by signifying practice (Barthes, 1981); where the subversive power of the texts is recognised, which transcend hierarchies between different genres and between different forms of representation; where meanings of texts are discursively constructed; where the relation between the author and the text and the reader is placed on equal

terms.

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